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SUBJECT: TFGG01: Russian media focuses on American hostility toward Moscow, a divided Europe, and Western media bias

REF: A)MOSCOW 2343 B)MOSCOW 2366 C)MOSCOW 2383 D)MOSCOW 2407

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In the week since the signing of the six-point agreement, the Russian media concentrated largely on the conflict's aftermath, U.S. antagonism towards Russia, the division in Europe over how to deal with Moscow, and continued Western media bias. Outrageous characterizations of Saakashvili and Georgian "crimes" in the media dramatically decreased but not without a few potshots and unflattering pictures. While it remains the number one news topic, overall coverage of the conflict has given way to other themes, including the Olympics and the economy. End Summary.

Media Anti-Americanism in media growing

¶2. (SBU) Since the end of active hostilities last week, Russian media shifted its focus away from slandering Georgia to blackening U.S. policies and actions in the Caucasus. Television news and print media castigated the U.S. Komsomolskaya Pravda, a popular tabloid, carried a photo of the Secretary with her head superimposed on the body of Conan the Barbarian and a caption urging her to "cool down." Anti-American television commentator Mikhail Leontyev continued the highly emotional attacks, comparing the Secretary to a mental patient.

¶3. (SBU) Statements from Russian officials echoed the anti-American theme. Russian UN diplomat Vitaly Churkin blamed the U.S. for preventing a UN resolution aimed at helping to settle the conflict. Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin said he would be "disgusted" to work with those who sided with the "aggressor", a clear jab at Washington. Pro-Kremlin newspaper Izvestiya accused the U.S. of trying to scare Russia by threatening sanctions and diplomatic isolation.

Europe divided?

¶4. (SBU) While Washington was painted as the aggressor in Russian media, Europe was portrayed as divided over whether to go along with the U.S. or keep an open line with Moscow. Russian media played upon this image in its coverage of the NATO ministerial. Izvestiya quoted UK Foreign Minister David Miliband as deviating from the U.S. line, commenting that "such a position in London... leaves Rice in the pleasant company of the Poles and the Balts." Channel One, a state-owned broadcaster, said that despite Washington's intention to isolate Russia, "the doors of the NATO-Russia council aren't shut."

Western media bias

¶5. (SBU) Since the beginning of the conflict, Russian media and officials accused Western news agencies of anti-Moscow bias (see reftels.) These charges were parroted last week and have surfaced again this week. The state-owned Russian TV station Vesti-24 announced that Russia's mission to NATO has launched an Internet site designed to "break the information blockade of Russia regarding

the events in South Ossetia." Channel One ran a piece on a pro-Russian rally at NATO headquarters. A Russian MP at the rally said "Western media will not show this [the rally] because they have an entirely different goal. They work in this situation not as a media, but mostly as propagandists." On the website Gazeta.ru, a commentator said coverage on BBC, CNN, and SkyNews was rife with "deliberate subjectivity."

¶6. (SBU) Comment: As foreseen in reftels, the Russian media put the South Ossetian conflict in the context of a wider conflict between the U.S. and Russia. Continued complaints of Western bias from Russian language news outlets seem aimed to fuel domestic suspicion of reporting not coming from Kremlin controlled/influenced media. End comment.